

UEBERGANG AGRICULTURE

Monsanto Grower of the Year Finalist

Ross Uebergang farms 400 hectares of irrigated cotton yielding up to 13 bales per hectare in recent years. 'Tinobah' totals 2200 hectares, with 650 hectares irrigation country comprising a mix of flood and centre pivots. Dryland farming makes up 400 hectares while the remainder of the operation is cattle including 80 hectares of irrigated pastures and a small backgrounding feedlot. Manure from the feedlot operation is used to fertilise crops. The operation relies on water allocations from the Chinchilla Weir, flood harvesting and overland flow. Treated water from nearby coal seam gas operations currently accounts for 40-50% of the farm's overall water allocation. Uebergang Agriculture employs two full time employees and one part time employee.

During the past decade Ross has introduced the use of centre pivots into the irrigation scheme to improve water efficiency in areas where topography makes flood irrigation unsuitable. Centre pivots now make up 75% of irrigation scheme and achieve both greater water use efficiency and labour savings. Over the past three years he has improved irrigation management by tightening watering intervals and watering more often, which he says has drastically reduced stress on the bush and lifted yields by 30-40%. The centre pivots also save on seed bed preparation operations as there is no tilling required. "Since I came home we've really pushed the centre pivots," Ross explains. "I did a case study while on placement at university and really saw the benefits pivots had in that business and I could see a real fit in our area. Laterals and other overhead systems wouldn't work here, purely because of the topography of the land plus the cost per hectare is a lot higher than centre pivot. I'm really happy with the way the system is working."



HOME PROPERTY

"Tinobah", Miles, Western Downs, QLD

OWNERS

David, Margot, Ross and Ingrid Uebergang

TOTAL ENTERPRISE SIZE

2200 ha

AREA TO COTTON 2015/2016

400 ha

YIELD TARGET

12.5 bales/ha irrigated, 3.5 bales/ha dryland

WATER ALLOCATIONS

River (1400 megs), recycled bore water (2000), storages (1700)

TYPE/S OF IRRIGATION

Centre pivot (2/3), flood irrigation (1/3)

NO. STAFF

Two full time and one part time employee

ENTERPRISES

Cropping and cattle





Cotton is the pillar crop in a varied rotation system including cover crops and cereals. Attention to cover cropping and stubble retention has greatly aided in storing more moisture and limiting irrigation runoff. Ross works with smaller field sizes, averaging approximately 40 hectares and aims to streamline operations. "Focusing on a single crop of high yielding cotton allows us to gain efficiencies with machinery, labour and irrigation resources as we aren't swapping operations constantly and trying to juggle several crops throughout the season."

Ross is proactive in environmental protection, fencing the river to reduce erosion, conducting aerial shoots to control pigs and retaining wildlife corridors which double as wind breaks to limit spray drift. The weed management program on Tinobah involves a strict pre-emergent program, beginning before a field goes into fallow and ending approximately six weeks before planting. "This allows for good control of hard-to-kill weeds and limits the use of knock down chemicals," Ross explains. "We aim to only use roundup "in crop" as that is where it gives us the most

benefit. We have also started using a shielded sprayer recently giving us the use of several more chemicals for hard to kill weeds in crop. We use a wide variety of chemicals to prevent resistance and for insects we always wait until we hit threshold. Once a spray is necessary we always use a product which is "soft" on beneficial insects."

Constantly looking for new ways to better utilise water and land is a key feature of Ross' management style. Earthworks are currently underway to construct a new ring tank with deeper and larger storage to reduce water lost to evaporation. "I love my job, I really enjoy growing cotton and I love a good harvest every year," he says. "You always want to do the best job possible. Every day we're trying to achieve better water efficiencies, we've spent a lot of time on levelling country to get the best flow off water, the best infiltration and the best crop. Obviously if your farm's really profitable then you can really build on that and you've got the money to invest in it. I'm really proud that someone has thought that our enterprise is good enough to be at this level."



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